

Ouachita Baptist University

Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita

Honors Theses

Carl Goodson Honors Program

1-1970

A Comparative Study of Henry Fielding and William Thackeray

Carol Ann Gumper

Ouachita Baptist University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Gumper, Carol Ann, "A Comparative Study of Henry Fielding and William Thackeray" (1970). *Honors Theses*. 594.

https://scholarlycommons.obu.edu/honors_theses/594

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Carl Goodson Honors Program at Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Ouachita. For more information, please contact mortensona@obu.edu.

SPECIAL STUDIES OUTLINE

In the department of English I have decided to work with two famous British novelists--Henry Fielding and Wm. Makepiece Thackeray. Fielding is acclaimed as the author of the greatest English novel, The History of Tom Jones. Thackeray has a close second with his novel, Vanity Fair. Thackeray was influenced by Fielding's work. Thackeray's novel, The History of Pendennis, has been compared to Fielding's Tom Jones. In Vanity Fair, Thackeray seems to have gotten ideas and experiences from Fielding's Amelia.

In my work this semester I will attempt to explore this relationship further and learn more about the similarities and differences that exist between these four novels by the two best novelists in the field. I shall read the four novels and study the life of the author. In my paper at the end of the semester, I shall show the results of comparing and analyzing these two authors and their ideas and experiences as revealed in their works. By doing this I hope to learn more about two British novelists who are tops in their profession and have captured the imagination of many with their fine works.

A COMPARITIVE STUDY OF HENRY FIELDING
AND WILLIAM THACKERAY

A Paper
Presented to
Mrs. Chambliss
Ouachita Baptist University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for
Special Studies H492

by
Carol Ann Gumper
January 1970

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. LIFE OF HENRY FIELDING	1
II. SUMMARY OF <u>TOM JONES</u>	3
ANALYSIS OF <u>TOM JONES</u>	4
STRUCTURE OF <u>TOM JONES</u>	6
CRITICISM OF <u>TOM JONES</u>	7
INTRODUCTION TO <u>AMELIA</u>	8
SUMMARY OF <u>AMELIA</u>	8
CRITICISM ABOUT <u>AMELIA</u>	10
SIMILARITIES IN <u>TOM JONES</u> AND <u>AMELIA</u>	11
III. LIFE OF WILLIAM THACKERAY	12
IV. SUMMARY OF <u>VANITY FAIR</u>	13
ANALYSIS OF <u>VANITY FAIR</u>	16
SUMMARY OF <u>THE HISTORY OF PENDENNIS</u>	19
THACKERAY AND PENDENNIS.	20
V. THE ARGUMENT CONTINUES	23
BIBLIOGRAPHY	25

CHAPTER I

Life of Henry Fielding. Henry Fielding, novelist, essayist, and dramatist, was born October 8, 1707, to Lieutenant Edmund Fielding and Sarah Gould.¹ The family had aristocratic connections. Fielding read law at Temple and had a thorough education in classical and modern literature. In 1734, he married Charlotte Cracock² and lived in splendor for a few years due to a legacy from her mother. Fielding leased the "little theatre" in the Haymarket, managing and writing plays for production. The Licensing Act of 1737 ended this venture, so he turned to law.³ He continued writing, centering his efforts on journalism and editing. In 1744, Fielding's wife died leaving him heartbroken. Three years later he married his wife's maid, Martha Daniel, to secure a mother for his children.⁴

In 1748, Fielding was appointed justice of the peace for Westminster and Middlesex; he lived on subsistant pay, because he would not accept money from the poor.⁵ He took a stand on such issues as the crime wave, the liquor problem, and relief and legal aid to the poor. He reformed the London police force and accepted the severe criminal code of his time. His financial difficulties forced him to work harder at writing, caused

¹W. Somerset Maugham (ed.), The History of Tom Jones (Greenwich: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1964), p. v.

²Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (ed.), British Authors Before 1800 (New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1952), p. 188.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid.

him to explore various kinds of literature, and enabled him to discover the field (the novel) in which his genius was destined to make him famous.⁶

Fielding became famous with the publication of his novel, The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling, in 1749.⁷ This novel is now acclaimed as the best in the English language. None of Fielding's other novels compared to Tom Jones, but though they lose out in comparison to Tom Jones, among the other few great works they hold their own. This is true for his last novel, Amelia. Lady Montague wrote in her copy of the novel, "Inferior to himself, Superior to most others."⁸ Fielding wrote this novel in 1754,⁹ just before he died suffering from gout and other ailments resulting from his wild youth.

⁶Alan David McKillop, The Early Masters of English Fiction (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1967), p. 136.

⁷Ibid., p. 118.

⁸Ibid., p. 138.

⁹Ibid.

CHAPTER II

Summary of Tom Jones. Tom Jones is a story of a boy's growth to manhood, including his fight for his true love, Sophia Western. The novel ends in the fairy book fashion--the lovers are reunited after many mishaps and live happily ever after. The entire book centers around Tom, the foundling prince, the gentleman of the age.¹⁰

Tom is an orphan left in the care of Squire Allworthy and his sister, Miss Bridget. No one knows who his mother is; a local girl is blamed, but the reader is left with the feeling that she is not the real mother. Miss Bridget marries Captain John Blifil and has a son, Blifil, a few years younger than Tom. The Captain dies, and Bridget's affection moves from her own son to the orphan Tom. Tom, because of his natural kindness and good spirits, is the favorite in the household. Blifil, the rightful heir, is jealous of the attention given to Tom, a bastard, which he feels belongs to him. After his mother dies, Blifil lies to the Squire about Tom. Since the evidence is against him, Tom is banished from the house.

The book deals with Tom's adventures during his banishment, and his search for Sophia who has also left home rather than submit to the arranged marriage to Blifil. In the end Tom discovers that he is the son of Miss Bridget, fathered by a student the Squire had befriended.

¹⁰Kenneth Rexroth, "Tom Jones," The Saturday Review, L (July 1, 1967), p. 13.

Tom is restored as the rightful heir, and Blifil leaves. Tom is allowed to marry Sophia, because he is now considered a suitable husband for Sophia.¹¹

Analysis of Tom Jones. Tom is the hero of this book, and Fielding intended this to be. Tom as a person is almost too good to be true. His actions are always motivated by a desire to please or help others. The novel is based on suspenseful episodes in Tom's career. By contact with others, often to his disadvantage, Tom learns about himself and how to adjust to a world based on reward and punishment rather than on good will.

To Tom, the answer was simple;

the pattern of life was obvious and simple, perfect and beautiful. Any difficulty which there might be lay in his will. It had the task of forcing his high spirits, his hot desires, his stubborn individuality into obedience.¹²

Since Tom was a man of his passion, it was only natural that his will yielded gradually to the correct, settled pattern of life. The pattern would wait, and after Tom was through sowing his wild oats, he could settle down, satisfied after ridding himself of his youthful passions.¹³ Tom did not worry about his misdeeds. He followed his instincts and then studied the results. Any penitence felt on his part was usually caused because his action was misunderstood, or because he did not understand the reason for labeling it wrong.

¹¹Summary of Tom Jones.

¹²Carl Van Doren, "Tom Jones and Phillip Carey--Heroes of Two Centuries," Century Magazine, CX (May, 1925), p. 118.

¹³Ibid.

Fielding believed there was a sharp line between what a gentleman should do and should not do. To him, the two unpardonable offenses were lying and meanness.¹⁴ Even though to others Tom may seem corrupt because of his loose morals, he is never guilty of these offenses. Fielding's theory of a natural gentleman was that gentlemanliness is "generosity of soul."¹⁵ Some men are born as aristocrats, others are born as gentlemen. Tom's generosity in the form of help to Mrs. Waters saves his life, because she in turn helps him at the crucial moment in his life when everyone is seemingly against Tom.

Fielding has been criticized for lack of depth in his characters, but his characters are better remembered because of their actions as compared to characters revealed by an author's description of traits. His aim was not to record events but to deal with essential underlying truths. At the beginning of Tom Jones, he states that he intends to write about human nature. His conception of the novel was that it should be a broad and representative picture of mankind rather than a study of individual lives.

Tom is pictured as a ward, a companion, an impulsive youth, a traveler, a lover and a son. Sophia is the girl next door, the girl Tom loves, the cause of dispute between her father and her aunt, the rich heiress and the ultimate goal for any male. To different people these two characters are viewed differently. Because of this, Tom Jones is appealing two hundred years later. People enjoy being able to see themselves in each of the characters.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 115.

¹⁵ Rexroth, loc. cit.

Structure of Tom Jones. Tom Jones is written as an epic.¹⁶

Various groups of characters lead their separate existencies in terms of their own class, contacting one another, and rounding out the central situation. There is a definite hero and villain, and Fielding has been criticized for his portrayal of ^{the} good and evil elements. Blifil is too evil; Tom is too lucky; Squire Allworthy is too perfect.¹⁷ Fielding, like most writers, found that it was impossible to depict a perfectly virtuous man without making him a little stupid and susceptible to the deviltry of the evil elements or portray an evil person without making him lack life in order to keep him from becoming a powerful sinister figure.¹⁸

Most outrageous coincidences occur with little concern, because the action is so well planned that the reader is caught up in another episode before he can protest. One does not have time to wonder at the probability of Sophia and Tom stopping at the same lodging house the night they both run away. Right away one discovers Tom in bed with another lady, but both are rudely interrupted by an irate husband who thinks the woman is his run-away wife. Meanwhile the real wife eludes her husband by leaving by the back door. She meets Sophia on the road. Sophia had also left, angry at discovering Tom was at the inn with a woman. The two ladies discover at day break when they can see each other that they are cousins. Sophia's father arrives at the inn after Sophia's departure and finds Tom. He accuses Tom of knowing of Sophia's

¹⁶Bruce McCullough, Representative English Novelists: Defoe to Conrad (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1946), p. 50.

¹⁷W. Somerset Maugham, "The Ten Best Novels: Tom Jones," The Atlantic Monthly CLXXX (December, 1947), p. 124.

¹⁸Ibid.

whereabouts, but Tom learns for the first time that Sophia has run away and had been in the inn.¹⁹ So close, but yet so far away.

The outrageous coincidences are fitting parts of a brightly painted novel that has little subtlety. Characters are drawn from all walks of life and range from the lowest amateur highwayman to the highest level of elite London society. Irony is Fielding's trademark. He uses it to depict situations in which the characters are used to illustrate some moral or doctrine. Irony shows how even a bastard can marry the most desirable girl in England and still associate with common men of the street. He wanted to make a good man wise rather than than a bad man good. This was best achieved by laughing mankind out of its vices and hypocrisies.²⁰

Criticisms of Tom Jones. Fielding was aware that many of his readers were shocked by Tom Jones. Dr. Samuel Johnson said it was "the most corrupt work he knew."²¹ Robert Lewis Stevenson called it "dirty, dull, and false."²² In relating to Tom's character, Fielding defended his work by saying that the morality he was preaching

weighs the faults of wildness and youth against "one of the most humane, tender, honest hearts that ever was" and finds the faults "vastly overbalanced"...Fornication is not a grave sin compared to cruelty, treachery, fraud, or bigotry.

A happy marriage will cure or contain lechery but cannot do much to improve avarice. Selfishness is a much greater sin, because it makes marriage or any other happy relationship impossible. "In brief, Charity covers a multitude of sins."²⁴

¹⁹McCullough, op. cit., p. 57.

²⁰Maugham, The History of Tom Jones, op. cit., p. vii.

²¹Ibid. ²²Ibid. ²³Ibid., p. vii-viii. ²⁴Ibid., p. viii.

Introduction to Amelia. There were scarcely two years between the publication of Tom Jones in 1749, and Amelia in 1751.²⁵ Fielding hadn't changed much from the Fielding in 1749, except physically his health was failing him. He really did not have anything new to say or expound on in this second novel.

Summary of Amelia. Amelia is about a marriage in which the husband, Captain Booth, is constantly bringing trouble upon his family, because he has not settled down to married life or accepted the fact that he cannot gallivant around town with other young dandies. His wife, Amelia, has her happiness and fortune tied to Booth, a retired Army officer, who is trying to get another commission.

Booth is arrested one night when trying to save a stranger from two thugs. He is hauled before the magistrate, but his story is not believed because he is penniless and shabbily dressed. He is thrown into jail and robbed of his few possessions by the inmates.

In jail, Booth is noticed by Miss Matthews, an old friend of questionable background, who is being escorted to her private cell which she had succeeded to getting from the jailor. She sends Booth a guinea enabling him to buy back his possessions. She invites Booth to her cell, and they proceed to relate their unhappy experiences.

Miss Matthews is in jail for attacking a soldier who had seduced her under false pretenses. Booth tells of his marriage to Amelia Harris. Her mother had been against Amelia marrying a penniless soldier, so they eloped and later with the help of Dr. Harrison, a family friend, reconciled Amelia's mother to the marriage.

²⁵Henry Fielding, The Works of Henry Fielding (Vol. 4 of 5 vols. Philadelphia; John D. Morris & Company, 1902_, p. xv.

Booth's regiment leaves for Gibraltar; Amelia is left pregnant in the care of her mother and sister, Elizabeth. Booth is wounded and is very ill, so Amelia goes to Gibraltar to nurse him. While there, she becomes sick, but they have no money to return to a milder climate. Booth borrows money from Sergeant Atkinson, Amelia's foster brother, and moves to Montplier.

Dr. Harrison writes and tells them of the death of Amelia's mother, and that the property will go to her sister. They return home but are given a cold welcome and treated rudely by Elizabeth. Harrison helps the destitute Booth family by setting Booth up as a gentleman farmer, but in his absence Booth is reduced to bankruptcy. He goes to London and finds a place for his family to live.

While Booth is waiting for his family to move to London, another misfortune puts him in jail. This time Booth is allowed to spend a few nights with Miss Matthews in her cell. Shortly after they both are released. Booth is afraid that Miss Matthews will tell his wife of the affair. He confides his problem to Colonel James, his former officer, who has married Miss Bath, a friend of the couple. Colonel James is interested himself in Miss Matthews, but he cannot help out in any intercession.

Sargent Atkinson meets the Booths in the park one day and joins their household and helps take care of the children. Miss Matthews is angry at the way that Booth treated her, so she turns Colonel James against Booth. Colonel Bath hears of his brother-in-law's poor opinion of Booth and challenges Booth to a duel. Booth wins the duel, but does not take Bath's life. This impresses Bath so much that he reconciles Booth and James.

Booth is again falsely arrested, this time by Dr. Harrison who had heard that Booth was extravagantly building up debts by wild spending and gambling. He releases him when he finds out differently. Miss Matthews again causes trouble between James and Booth, and Booth is again put in jail. Dr. Harrison clears him, and James forgives Booth. Miss Matthews promises never to bother him again.

Dr. Harrison learns through one of his patients, who was a clerk to the lawyer who made up Mrs. Harris' will, that Elizabeth and the lawyer, Murphy, had drawn up a false will in Elizabeth's favor. Murphy is convicted of forgery and the estate goes to Amelia. They confront Elizabeth with the truth, and she flees to France. Amelia is kindhearted and sends her a yearly allowance. Booth promises never to gamble again, and they settle down to a quiet and prosperous life centered around their children.²⁷

Criticism about Amelia. When Amelia was first published, critics tore it apart. Readers felt it was shallow and empty compared to Tom Jones. Fielding opened himself to more criticism by offering to revise the next edition and remedy the defects. Though Fielding had suffered from being identified with Tom Jones, erroneous identification with Captain Booth hurt him even more. He did not want to be identified with a story of a man like Booth who brings unhappiness to marriage because his ^{own} first marriage has been so happy.²⁸

²⁷Summary of Amelia.

²⁸Fielding, The Works of Henry Fielding, op. cit., p. xxi.

Similarities in Tom Jones and Amelia. Amelia repeats the theme in Tom Jones that "hypocrisy is the blackest of vices, and that kindness and honesty may sometimes atone for fleshly indulgences."²⁸ In each novel the main character is deeply wronged. Tom, by his brother, and Amelia by her hypocritical sister. Even though the novels are alike in purpose, Amelia lacks the vigor and exuberance of Tom Jones.

Scenes from Amelia center around London life, including time spent in jail. There are few country scenes or invigorating, outdoor activities such as hunting or following the hounds. Most of the energy spent in Amelia is feasting, drinking and gambling.

In Tom Jones, Fielding presented a picture of what a perfect man would be like. In Amelia he depicts the perfect woman. Fielding insists that his characters are no more than puppets which he manipulates in situations to bring about the desired effect. He is the manager of the puppets and feels he has the write to interrupt the story and explain some point or tell an anecdote.²⁹ Maybe this aloofness from the plot and characters is what enabled him to become the objective writer that he is. He is better able to depict life as it really is and can see more clearly points of difference in the characters. Realistically he can see that even the heroes or heroines can have their bad moments. He believed that in "this great theatre of nature...it is often the same person who represents the villain and the hero, and he who engages your admiration today will probably attract your contempt tomorrow."³⁰

²⁸Ibid., p. xvii.

²⁹Ibid., p. xxvi.

³⁰Robert Halsband, "Fielding: the Hogarth of Fiction," The Saturday Review of Literature, XXXIII (September 30, 1950), p. 20.

CHAPTER III

Life of William Thackeray. William Makepiece Thackeray was born in Calcutta, India on July 18, 1811.³¹ His father died when he was four, so his mother sent him to England to live with relatives. His mother remarried and returned to London with Thackeray's new stepfather. Thackeray got along well with his step father.

Thackeray entered Trinity College at Cambridge³² and took up writing; he wrote for the weekly paper, "The Snob."³³ Within a year he left school and traveled, but family insisted upon a profession so he took up law at Middle Temple.³⁴ He soon dropped out and married Isabella Shaw in 1836.³⁵ He supported her by writing and sketching.

Four years later, Thackeray's wife went insane, and he was left with the care of two young daughters. He refused to commit his wife to an institution or divorce her--he practiced the strict Victorian morality that his age insisted upon--and clung to the hope that she would get better. His wife's condition forced him to haunt the London clubs which offered the social life that his home could not give.³⁶

Thackeray continued his writings which consisted of short contributions and sketches to newspapers. Readers became acquainted

³¹John W. Dodds, Thackeray: A Critical Portrait (New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1963), p. 3.

³²Ibid., p. 5.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., p. 8.

³⁶Ibid., p. 15.

with him when the "Edinburgh" ³⁷ newspaper agreed to print a novel by Thackeray in monthly installments. This novel was different from others in that it was not yet complete when the series started. The novel, Vanity Fair, was printed under the title "Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society"³⁸ and was started as a weekly satire on the different types of people in the English society. Thackeray found himself becoming more involved with the characters and continuing their lives further than just a monthly sketch. People read his installments out of curiosity and ended up liking the story.

At the novel's finish it was printed with a different sub-title, "A Novel Without A Hero."³⁹ Vanity Fair was published in 1846,⁴⁰ and his second great novel, The History of Pendennis came out about four years later. Thackeray died at the age of fifty-two. Edmund Yates wrote of Thackeray's death in 1863,

Thackeray was dead; and the purest English prose writer of the 19th century and the novelist with a greater knowledge of the human heart, as it really is, than any other...was suddenly struck down in the midst of us.⁴⁰

³⁷Malcolm Elwin, Thackeray, A Personality (New York: Russell & Russell, 1966), p. 172.

³⁸Dodds, op. cit., p. 19.

³⁹Earnest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1966), p. 357.

⁴⁰Henry Van Dyke, "Writers We Love to Read," Harper's Magazine CXL (January, 1920), p. 174.

CHAPTER IV

Summary of Vanity Fair. Becky Sharp and Amelia Sedley become good friends while students at Miss Pinkerton's School for girls. Becky, a selfish girl, is not much liked by other students. Becky goes home with Amelia at the end of the term and meets Joseph Sedley, Amelia's older brother. Jos, on leave from service in India, is shy with girls, especially with the extroverted Becky. Becky is willing to believe herself in love with Jos. His position and wealth far outweigh his faults and blunders. Jos becomes ill and returns to India.

Amelia is in love with George Osborne, but Captain Dobbin, also in the service in India is in love with Amelia. He realizes that George is much more suitable for Amelia. Becky leaves the Sedleys and takes a job as governess to two young girls at Queen's Crawley. She ingratiates herself with Sir Pitt, the head of the house, and with Miss Crawley, a wealthy spinster aunt. Sir Pitt's son Rawdon falls in love with Becky but Becky does not see him much, because she goes to take care of Miss Crawley during her illness. While there she learns that Lady Crawley has died. Sir Pitt asks her to marry him, but she has already secretly married Rawdon.

Amelia's romance with George is falling apart because through unfortunate business deals, the Sedleys have lost most of the money. The Osbornes are against George marrying a penniless girl. But Dobbin insists that George go through with the marriage regardless of family objections. On finding out, Mr. Osbornes takes steps to disown

George. During the war with Napoleon, the two couples meet in Brussels. Jos and Dobbin were also in the city. George becomes infatuated with Becky and Dobbin takes care of the neglected Amelia. Becky is a real hit with the military society.

George is killed in the battle of Belgium. Rawdon returns safely from the Battle of Waterloo. Both Amelia and Becky have a child. Becky and Rawdon move to London and live on a much grander scale than Rawdon can afford. Becky makes a very good impression on Lord Steyne, and all of society is talking of the two. Becky's receives her greatest wish, presentation at Court. Sir Pitt had died and the oldest son had inherited the title and property. His brother, Sir Pitt, has also fallen in love with Becky.

Amelia struggles to keep her son with her, but her financial difficulties force her to let the Osbornes rear him. Rawdon goes to prison for his debts, and Becky does nothing in trying to get him out. Rawdon is released by his brother's wife, and goes home to find Becky entertaining Lord Steyne. Rawdon leaves for a job abroad and never returns again.

Jos returns from India and tries to improve his family's living conditions. Dobbin, still in love with Amelia, reconciles Mr. Osborne to Amelia and when he dies he leaves a good part of his fortune to his grandson. Dobbin is able to persuade Amelia to marry him. Becky leaves her child with the Sir Pitts and travels the continent. Jos, in spite of warning from Dobbin, is her companion. He takes out a large life insurance policy in her name. He dies a few months later while with Becky. The cause is never known, and Becky spends the rest of her life playing the part of the virtuous widow and can now afford to be generous.⁴¹

Analysis of Vanity Fair. Vanity Fair was written to portray society with all its shallowness, hypocrisy and meanness. Thackeray got the title from a chapter in Pilgrims Progress⁴² which tells of Christian and Faithful attending a fair by that name. The chapter describes Vanity Fair.

Vanity Fair is the City of Destruction in its gala dress, in its most seductive sensual allurements. It is this world in miniature, with its various temptations...The temptations to worldliness are the strongest and most common in the Christian race.⁴³

Thackeray's intention is to reveal society to itself and for its own benefit and instruction. He loved the world in which he lived, but he knew society could be harsh and mean--Thackeray experienced ridicule and rejection as a writer and as a result of his wife's illness.⁴⁴ His book characters speak as expected in real life, reflecting their class and personal idiosyncrasies. His lower class people tend to be better than reality.

Thackeray warned the readers that the novel would have no hero, therefore he did not have to worry about developing one central figure, but because of the dominating, very much alive personality of Becky Sharpe, she is considered the heroine.⁴⁵

Becky is cunning, selfish, cynical, calculating, and unprincipled to others if being so is beneficial to herself. Becky acts as the

⁴²Frederick R. Karl, A Reader's Guide to the Nineteenth Century British Novel (New York: The Noonday Press, 1965), p. 184.

⁴³Rev. George B. Cheever, lectures on the Pilgrims Progress and on the Life and Times of John Bunyan. (New York: Ed Walker, 1847), pp. 363-364.

⁴⁴Abbott Lyman, "A Great-Hearted Novelist," The Outlook, XCVIII (July 22, 1911), p. 608.

⁴⁵Baker, loc. cit.

catalyst between the three families--the Crawleys, the Osbornes, and the Sedleys. She binds the families and the plot together.

Morality is an issue in the novel when one views the life of Becky. Thackeray believed morality was based on class, upbringing, and circumstance and used it as one way of further developing his characters. Thackeray knew he was restricted by the Victorian moral code of his day, yet he did not shy away from the sex situation. He prepares the reader for the situation by revealing character traits before the action takes place that reveal the type of person and situation he would most likely fit in.

In *Vanity Fair* Becky maintains her livelihood after her husband leaves her by her promiscuous association with wealthy men. Thackeray said about his treatment of Becky,

We must pass over a part of Mrs. Rebecca Crawley's bibliography with that lightness and delicacy which the world demands--the moral world, that has, perhaps, no particular objection to vice, but an insuperable repugance to hearing vice called by its proper name.⁴⁶

He likened it to a lady who would not permit the word 'breeches' to be said in her presence but was willing to see them in actuality every day of the week. The law of politeness required that such delicacies be treated in a perfectly genteel and unoffensive manner.

He continues:

it has been the wish of the present writer...deferentially to submit to the existence of wickedness in a light, easy and agreeable manner, so that nobody's fine feeling may be offended..If we were to give a full account of her proceedings ...there might be some reason for people to say this book was improper.⁴⁷

⁴⁶Dodds, op. cit., p. 135.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 136.

Thackeray did not confuse reality with indecency. He wrote about physical temptations without turning the description into a new temptation for the reader.⁴⁸ Thackeray avoids full implications of Becky's behavior by explaining that her behavior would be like anyone else's if she had had sufficient income and standing. Her motivations are simplified to her single desire to become a part of society. Becky represents the jealous have-nots.⁴⁹

The extreme of Becky in the novel is Amelia Crawley. Amelia "is the maternal, possessive woman whose entire life is absorbed by fidelity to the objects of her affection"⁵⁰ She is the image of Victorian ladies, dull and relatively secure. Today in a world of woman suffrage, Amelia is less admired and comes across as a simple-hearted creature, helpless in complex situations.

Thackeray intended for these two characters to balance each other. He moves back and forth from Becky and Amelia to prevent any one line of action from dominating the plot.⁵¹ In the menagerie of society the Crawleys represent country society, Rawdon and Becky portray the whirl of London Society, and later Becky gives a glimpse of the shady life on the continent. Dobbin and his friends introduce the military way of life and life in India. The Osbornes and the Sedleys show one the business world--success and defeat.⁵² Vanity Fair is truly representative of Thackeray's social world.

People are exposed as hollow, false, hypocritical, artificial, showy and insincere. "Thackeray intended that each character in his

⁴⁸Karl, op. cit., p. 174.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 180.

⁵⁰McCullough, op. cit., p. 159.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 160.

⁵²Ibid., p. 157.

novel, including Dobbin, should transform the greed of a materialistic society into personal terms and become the fool of his own passion."⁵³

Through the use of satire, Thackeray succeeds in portraying a bit of everyone in his characters. That is one of the reasons for the appeal of Vanity Fair.

Summary of the History of Pendennis. This novel deals with the story of a young gentleman of fashion, Arthur Pendennis, who goes to the university, wastes his inheritance, fails his studies, and reforms into a drop out writing for a living in London.

Pendennis' father died when he was young, so he has been raised by his mother along with Laura, a younger ward. Pendennis becomes infatuated with an actress, so Helen, his mother, writes Major Pendennis, a retired Army officer and her brother-in-law. The Major clears up the romance with Emily Costigan and sends Pendennis to Oxford to study. Major gets Emily a job in London on one of the stages there.

Pendennis gives the impression that he is a very rich aristocrat and becomes well known for his flashy clothes and keen wit. He discovers he has spent all of his inheritance and has failed the examinations. Pendennis is very ashamed and returns home. The neighboring estate is opened by the owner, Sir Francis Clavering, and the family provided entertainment to Pendennis, especially Blanche, the younger girl.

Laura lends Tom some money and he feels obligated to her, so he asks Laura to marry him. She turns him down.

In London, Pendennis rooms with George Warrington. George helps Pendennis get established as a writer and plans a budget for him to follow. Pendennis becomes sick and the family comes to take care of him. They decide to take him abroad to recuperate. On the trip his

mother becomes ill and dies. Feeling responsible for Pendennis now that his mother is gone, Major tries to arrange a marriage between Pendennis and Blanche. Blanche, a very good catch, can offer Pendennis a seat in Parliament and a very sizable inheritance. The Major blackmails Sir Clavering into giving up his seat to Pendennis by letting Clavering know that he knows that the first husband of Lady Clavering is still alive and that no real marriage to Clavering ever took place. Sir Clavering has also been paying off Colonel Altamont, the first husband, who keeps demanding more money to pay his gambling debts.

Pendennis realized that it was not right to obtain a seat in Parliament by this method and will not go along with the scheme. He writes Blanche and tells her of his changes of plans, but that if she is willing to live with him on what he makes, he will gladly marry her. Blanche turns him down for Henry Foker, an old friend of Pendennis. Henry refuses to marry Blanche when he finds out about the details of her life. Blanche marries a French count instead. Lady Clavering is horrified to learn that her first husband is still alive, but then she finds out that her marriage to Clavering is legal, since her marriage to Altamont is annulled because he had several existing marriages before her. Pen realizes he is in love with Laura, and she is now willing to marry him. Pen and Laura live happily ever after.⁵⁴

Thackeray and Pendennis. This novel is considered to be a partial autobiography of Thackeray's life.⁵⁵ Like Thackeray, Pendennis was

⁵⁴Summary of The History of Pendennis.

⁵⁵Dobbs, op. cit., p. 144.

fatherless, and both mothers worked hard to make ends meet and still retain the genteel way of life. Pendennis followed Thackeray's example in wasting his inheritance and writing as a profession. Pendennis' mother is based on Thackeray's mother who was loving, loyal, unselfish, and very much a lady even though impoverished.⁵⁶

Colonel Altamont is fashioned after Thackeray's step father.⁵⁷ Altamont was the scoundrel who returns from India and threatens the Clavering family's fortune and reputation. Though Thackeray was happy living with his step father, he resented the "man from India" who speculated with his inheritance and lost it in a bank venture in India.

George Warrington, Pendennis' friend, represents another side of Thackeray's life. Thackeray missed female companionship and visited his friends and turned to their wives and women in the London clubs to fill this part of his life. Thackeray fell in love with a Mrs. Brookfield, but because he was a gentleman he refused to let her become anything more than a source of emotional release through letters. Thackeray broke off the correspondence at the request of her husband.⁵⁸ Warrington was bound by marriage to a low class girl who had left him after a few months of marriage. Warrington remained faithful to his marriage vows, not because he hoped to get his wife back, but because as a gentleman, he would not think otherwise. When he falls in love with Laura, he breaks off the relationship before it can bring dishonor upon them.

Thackeray loved London. He was so familiar with its many parts that residences, houses and places are given their correct street and

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 157.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 80.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 140.

house number.⁵⁹ An accurate map of London can be drawn from the novel. The London clubs are another major description in Pendennis.⁶⁰ The clubs frequented by fashionable young men of London are true to life. As Pendennis grows older, the careers of Thackeray and Pendennis have less in common.

Pendennis is full of sound advice and useful information for the Victorian gentleman. According to Thackeray, a gentleman is the opposite of a snob or the traditional vain, egocentric gentleman. A real gentleman is "the virtuous gentleman whose birth is of little consequence and whose fortune is small."⁶¹ By those standards, Pendennis was a gentleman. Pendennis is trying to find his place in society, not sure he can really love again after the youthful emotional fire of his first love. If he can, is it fair to his would-be wife to be cheated out of his passionate first love?

Pendennis is called a novel of manners and correctly so. Thackeray gives a picture of the manners and morals, the humors and absurdities of the segment of society Thackeray saw as a writer.

⁵⁹ Lymon, op. cit., p. 609.

⁶⁰ John Wilson Bowyer and John Lee Brooks (ed.), The Victorian Age (New York; F. S. Crofts & Co., 1944), p. 348.

⁶¹ Karl, op. cit., p. 182.

CHAPTER IV

The Argument Continues. Since men have started writing, authors have been compared and their works analyzed with and against each other. The outstanding works through the centuries become the mode or pattern for the day. Each new author has a chance to out do his earlier colleagues. Fielding could not outdo Thackeray or get any help from him, but Thackeray could copy from Fielding one hundred year later. Though Fielding is considered the best novelist with his work, Tom Jones, he, like Thackeray copied from others. From the Greeks and Homer they used the structure and some of the same plots from their epics. Great men build upon great men.

Thackeray realized that Fielding had helped him, and he was thankful for the help. He wrote in the preface to Pendennis, "Since the author of Tom Jones was buried...no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict⁶² his utmost power--a man." After reading Amelia, one is justified in adding --a woman.

What these two men have done for the English language is summed up very nicely in this quote by Fabian Franklin.

What they have done for me is to put into the world a crowd of friends and companions, living people whom I love and hate, admire and despise, smile and smile with--who breathe again with the full breath of life every time I reread the books--whom I do not fully understand,...whom I do not wish fully to understand, but whom I actually do understand far more profoundly and vitally than any possible analysis, any explicit interpretation, could make me understand them.⁶³

⁶²Fielding, The Works of Henry Fielding, op. cit., p. xxvii.

⁶³Fabian Franklin, "One of the Olympians," The Saturday Review of Literature IV (July 7, 1928), p. 1013.

Fielding and Thackeray represent their time period. They are giving to new generations the true feelings and atmospheres, thoughts and ideas that existed during their lifetime. Doing this successfully is more important and beneficial to readers than reading them to find out which is the better of the authors.

Men pride themselves in argument and rhetoric, and literature is one field in which there is enough material to chose viewpoints. Man will never be satisfied with anyone's choice but their own, so arguments will continue and articles will be written in efforts to convince others of the author's viewpoint.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books

- Banerji, H. K. Henry Fielding. New York: Russell & Russell, 1962.
- Baker, Ernest A. The History of the English Novel. New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1966.
- Bowyer, John Wilson & Brooks, John Lee (ed.). The Victorian Age. New York: F. S. Crafts & Co., 1944.
- Cecil, David. Victorian Novelists. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1966.
- Cheever, Rev. George B. Lectures on the Pilgrims Progress and on the Life and Times of John Bunyan. New York: Ed Walker, 1847.
- Dodds, John W. Thackeray: A Critical Portrait. New York: Russell & Russell Inc., 1963.
- Elwin, Malcolm. Thackeray, A Personality. New York: Russell & Russell, 1966.
- Fielding, Henry. The Works of Henry Fielding. Vol. 4. Philadelphia: John D. Morris & Company, 1902.
- Fielding, Henry. The Works of Henry Fielding. Vol. 5. Philadelphia: John D. Morris & Company, 1902.
- Karl, Frederick R. A Reader's Guide to the Nineteenth Century British Novel. New York: The Noonday Press, 1965.
- Kunitz, Stanley J. & Hageraft, Howard (ed.). British Authors Before 1800. New York: The H. W. Wilson Company, 1952.
- McCullough, Bruce. Representative English Novelists: Defoe to Conrad. New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1946.
- McKillop, Alan David. The Early Masters of English Fiction. Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1967.
- Thackeray, William Makepiece. The History of Pendennis. New York: A. L. Burt Co., 1850.

- Thackeray, William Makepeace. Vanity Fair. New York; Random House, 1958.
- Trollope, Anthony. Thackeray. London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1968.
- Williams, Orlo. Some Great English Novels. London: MacMillan & Co., Ltd., 1926.

Periodicals

- Doren, Carl Van. "Tom Jones and Phillip Carey--Heroes of Two Centuries," Century Magazine, 110:115-20, May, 1925.
- Franklin, Fabian. "One of the Olympians," The Saturday Review of Literature, 4:1013, July 7, 1928.
- Halsband, Robert. "Fielding: The Hogarth of Fiction," The Saturday Review of Literature, 33:20-1, September 30, 1950.
- Haight, Gordon S. "The Bittersweet of Genius," The Saturday Review of Literature, 30:10-12, February 8, 1947.
- Lyman, Abbott. "A Great-Hearted Novelist," The Outlook, 98:608-10, July 22, 1911.
- Maugham, W. Somerset. "The Ten Best Novels: Tom Jones," The Atlantic Monthly, 180:120-41, December, 1947.
- Rexroth, Kenneth. "Tom Jones," The Saturday Review, 50:13, July 1, 1967.
- Van Dyke, Henry. "Writers We Love to Read," Harper's Magazine, 140:120-4, December, 1947.